

The History of Chevy-Chace

Describing the fatal Battle between Lord Percy, of Northumberland, and his 1500 Archers, and the Earl of Douglas, with 2000 Scots; in which both these Earls and most of their men were slain.

The noble families of the Percies, Earls of Northumberland, have always had a high esteem amongst all the English nobility; and, for their valour, famed throughout the world.

We might give a large account of the descent of that noble Earl, who is to be a chief part of the subject of the following history. History records him for the fortunate valour of a courteous knight, who killed the King of Scots, by running his spear into his eyes, as he was besieging Roxburg castle. Upon which his name was changed; and that of Percy given together with the Earldom of Northumberland; and this of whom I now speak, was his grandson and heir. But to come nearer the purpose; the noble Earl of Northumberland taking his progress, attended with fifteen hundred archers, passed on to the marshes of Scotland, and wishing for some venison, he was informed that in a very large forest beyond the Tweed, called the Chevy Chase, belonging to the Earl Douglas, a Scotch nobleman, there was such a sort of it that the like was in no other part of the kingdom, and provisions being scarce on the English side, made his men so forward that they desired to go out in parties, and bring away as much as they could undiscovered, but he despising a way that looked like deer-stealing, told them, if their courage was but sufficient for it fairly; himself would go with them, it would then be brought off with honour, as a lawful prize taken in an enemy's country.

To this motion of the Earl's they soon gave consent. And so the Earl made a vow, that for three days he would take his pleasure in hunting on Chevy Chase. And so sending for dogs and toils, early one Midsummer morning they passed the Tweed, and were, by a guide, directed to the place. So to the game they went. The dogs were put to rouse the harts, the horns sounded, and the huntsman's shouts with the dogs' cries, made a pleasant noise. But the villagers all thinking it had been the sound of war on some sudden invasion were so terrified, that some hid themselves while others fled from their habitations, and alarmed the country.

The harts and roes, though swift as the wind, could not out-strip the English arrows, our archers laying hundreds of them dead so that they got vast store of venison which made them doubt how to carry it off. Yet, having refreshed themselves, they found the store lessened.

But whilst the Earl was at supper, on a table made on the grass, and sitting on turfs, as he was about to give orders to his huntsmen to pursue the same sport next morning, in came a messenger in a

scarlet livery. On which the Earl demanded from what place he came, and what was his business, to which he most haughtily replied.

Sir, whatever you are, my master the noble Earl Douglas, chief ranger to the King of Scotland, to whom all these parks and chaces belong, hearing that you have presumed to enter and destroy his deer, by me he tells you, that if you do not immediately depart, your lives shall pay for the injuries you have done, before to-morrow noon.

This being said, he was about to depart but Earl Percy taking him by the sleeve, said, it is but convenient that you should carry back an answer to your great lord. Tell him my name is Percy, a name at which all Scotland has trembled. Tell him, I have proposed to take my pleasure in the forest two days longer, and if he is valiant let him interrupt my sport at the hazard of his life.

Upon that the messenger departed to the Scotch Earl, and related what was given him in charge by Earl Percy.

At which the Scotchman stormed and fretted, walking up and down in great fury. He enquired the number of the English, but the messenger could not give him a certain account, only guessed there might be about ten or twelve hundred men. Whereupon he ordered his men and armour, which was gilded all over with gold, to be got ready against morning light; also all friends and servants, together with as many as made up full two thousand men.

The Earl of Northumberland relying on his men's courage, who were the best archers in England, was so far from being daunted, that he ordered the table to be spread again, and store of wine in healths went round to their prosperity.

The sun no sooner gilded the horizon, but the sports were renewed, and the woods resounded with the pleasing noise, that morning they killed the most stately hart ever seen. Then the Earl turning to one of his knights, said, the time draws near, that if Douglas keeps his word, we shall have another kind of sport, therefore let it be our care to keep our men together, for man to man we can fight against any nation under the sun. But if I thought he would not come, we would remove to the next forest, for thither I perceive the deer are fled.

He had no sooner uttered these words, but Witherington, came up to him, saying, My Lord, cause the dogs to be called off and muster up your forces, for on the top of yonder hill I see Douglas, coming towards you, with upwards of two thousand spear men. I thank thee replied the

Earl and doubt not my courage. So Witherington bowing said, My Lord, I do not doubt so, to behave myself, and your men to-day, as to be remembered in most distant ages.

Immediately the horns blew a retreat, the dogs were called off, and the archers mustered about their leader, who raised up their courage with the following oration.

My renowned countrymen, it was by your consent we passed over the Tweed, which is now soon likely to be disturbed, Earl Douglas has sent me a challenge, and is going to give us battle, or make us fly over the Tweed. Pluck up your spirits, and consider that you are Englishmen, and that Percy fights at the head of you; be courageous, and fight for the honour of our king, and the renown of our country; gain a lasting fame which shall not die but with time itself.

Having said thus much, they all shouted and immediately fell into order, some pruning their arrows, and others new stringing their bows, made of trusty steel.

The English archers, in number fifteen hundred, were no sooner in readiness, but Douglas appeared on the top of the hill, mounted on a milk white steed, and his men ranged in order behind him, with their glittering spears; their number was just two thousand.

Earl Percy, taking a staff to his hand and a sword by his side, caused his men to move forward.

Earl Douglas being now within about forty paces, demanded whose men they were that durst presume to hunt in his forest and kill his fallow deer; whoever they were they must expect to be severely punished, commanding them at the same time to yield immediately if they expected mercy.

The English Earl replied, it matters not whose men they are; but what we have done we can justify, and what deer we have killed we will carry away, or die upon the spot.

This spoken with so much courage, made Douglas somewhat calmer; O, said he, I know thee Earl Percy, thou art an Earl as well as I; brave; if thou art as brave reports thee, let thou and I decide it.

This offer pleased Percy, who drawing his sword, bid defiance to the challenger, and both were immediately ready to engage, had not Witherington thus addressed himself to Earl Percy.

My Lord, heaven forbid that I and the rest of your servants should stand idle, whilst you are engaged; permit therefore my good Lord that we all partake of the glory of the day.

Hereupon all the English shouted, and the engagement became general.

The English Archers on the left division immediately sent a flight of arrows, which laid sixty of the Scotch dead; and the right division letting fly on the flank of their division, galled them most miserably. Earl Douglas seeing his men much discouraged, ordered them to advance and come to a close fight, whereby he imagined to make the English bows useless.

But he was mistaken, for whenever the front opened, the archers plied the Scotch with their arrows, while the others kept them in play with their swords, inasmuch that the ground was covered with their dead bodies.

And now Earl Percy being backed by divers knights, like a tempest he broke in amongst them, with such fury that he laid heaps of dead before him, inasmuch, that Earl Douglas who was fighting on the other side, and signalized his valour very much was forced to come and succour his broken forces when the two Earls met like enraged lions; no armour was proof against their clear well tempered swords. So the Earl Percy beginning to faint, thus bespoke the Earl Douglas:—

Noble Lord you see your blood begins to flow fast, and death you cannot escape if you contend with me any longer. I therefore in pity to your life, would have you yield yourself my prisoner; you shall be most nobly used and I'll prefer you to the king.

To this Earl Percy replied. As for my life, take you no care, but surely guard your own. My honour I prefer my honour before any thing, and it shall never be said that Percy yielded to a Scot.

Whilst they paused a little, an arrow coming from amongst the English archers pierced the valiant Douglas to the heart; who falling to the ground, his last words were. Fight on merry men, revenge my death, I am slain and Lord Percy lives to see me fall.

Earl Percy mourned Earl Douglas's death, as one glorious hero ever does another. But while he stood near the body, Sir Hugh Montgomery, a very valiant Scotch Knight let fly an arrow at him, which pierced his heart. Witherington perceiving this, and from whence the fatal shaft came, immediately vowed revenge, and therefore coming to Montgomery, with one stroke of a broad sword ended him. But himself did not long survive; for shortly after a Scot, with an arrow, put an end to the gallant hero's life. But the reader is referred to the Ballad for an account of the Bloody Battle. It cannot be better described.

The Excellent Old Ballad.

GOD prosper long our noble king,
Our lives and safeties all;
A woeful hunting once there did
In Chevy Chase befall.
The stout earl of Northumberland,
A vow to God did make,
His pleasure in the Scottish wood,
Three summer days to take;
The chiefest harts in Chevy-chace,
To kill and bear away.
The tidings to earl Douglas came,
In Scotland where he lay,
Who sent earl Percy present word,
They would prevent his sport,
The English earl not fearing this,
Did to the woods resort.
With fifteen hundred bowmen bold,
All chosen men of might,
Who knew full well in time of need,
To aim their shafts aright.
The bowmen muster'd on the hills,
Well able to endure,
Their backsides all with special care,
That day were guarded sure.
Lord Percy to the quarry went,
To view the slaughter'd deer,
Quoth he, earl Douglas promised
This day to meet me here,
If that I thought he would not come,
No longer would I stay:—
Then stept a brave young gentleman,
Thus to the earl did say,
Lo! yonder doth earl Douglas come,
His men in armour bright,
Full twenty hundred Scottish spears,
All marching in our sight,
Earl Douglas on a milk-white steed,
Most like a baron bold,
Rode foremost of his company,
Whose armour shone like gold,
Show me, said he, whose men you be,
That hunt so boldly here;

That without my consent do chase
And kill my fallow deer!
The man that first did answer make,
Was noble Percy, he:
Who said we list not to declare,
Nor show whose men we be.
Yet we will spend our dearest blood,
Thy chiefest harts to slay.
Then Douglas swore a solemn oath,
And thus, in rage, did say,
Ere thus I will out-braved be,
One of us two shall die,
I know thee well, an earl thou art,
Lord Percy, so am I,
But trust me Percy, pity it were,
And great offence to kill,
Any of these our harmless men,
For they have done no ill.
Let thou and I the battle try,
And set our men aside,
Accurs'd be he, Lord Percy said,
By whom this is denied,
Then stepp'd a gallant squire forth,
Witherington was his name,
Who said I would not have it told
To Henry, our king, for shame,
That e'er my captain fought on foot,
And I stood looking on;
You be two earls, said Witherington,
And I a squire alone.
Our English archers bent their bows,
Their hearts were good and true;
At the first flight of arrows sent,
Full three score Scots they slew.
They clos'd full fast on every side,
No slackness there was found,
And many a gallant gentleman,
Lay gasping on the ground.
At last these two stout Earls did meet,
Like captains of great might,
Like lions mov'd, they laid on loads,
And made a cruel fight.

They fought until they both did sweat,
With swords of temper'd steel.
Until the blood like drops of rain,
They trickling down did feel,
Yield thee, lord Percy, Douglas said,
In faith I will thee bring,
Where thou shalt high advanced be
By James, our Scottish king,
No, Douglas, quoth earl Percy then
Thy proffer I do scorn;
I will not yield to any Scot
That ever yet was born.
With that there came an arrow keen,
Out of an English bow,
Which struck earl Douglas to the heart,
A deep and deadly blow;
Who never spoke more words than these
Fight on my merry men all,
For why my life is at an end,
Lord Percy sees my fall.
Then leaving life, Earl Percy took
The dear man by the hand,
And said earl Douglas, for thy life
Would I had lost my land,
A knight among the Scots there was
Who saw earl Douglas die,
Who straight, in wrath, did vow revenge,
Upon the Earl Percy.
He pass'd the English archers all,
Without all dread or fear,
And through Earl Percy's body then
He thrust his hateful spear,
So thus did both these nobles die,
Whose courage none could stain,
An English Archer then perceived
The noble earl was slain.
He had a bow bent in his hand,
Made of a trusty tree,
An arrow of a cloth yard long
Up to the head drew he,
Against Sir Hugh Montgomery
So right his shaft had set,

The grey goose wing that was thereon
In his heart's blood was wet,
This fight did last from break of day
Till setting of the sun,
For when they wrung the evening bell,
The battle scarce was done.
For Witherington needs I must wail,
As one in doleful dumps.
For when his legs they were cut off,
He fought upon his stumps.
And the lord Maxwell, in likewise,
Did with earl Douglas die,
Of twenty hundred Scottish spears,
Scarce fifty-five did fly,
Of fifteen hundred Englishmen
Went home but fifty-three,
The rest were slain in Chevy-chace
Under the green wood tree.
This news was brought to Edinburg,
Where Scotland's king did reign,
That brave earl Douglas suddenly,
Was with an arrow slain.
O heavy news, king James did say,
Scotland can witness be,
I have not any captain more,
Of such account as he,
Like tidings to king Henry came,
Within as short a space.
That Percy, of Northumberland,
Was slain in Chevy-chace,
Now God be with him, said our king,
Sith, 'twill not better be,
I trust I have within my realm
Five hundred good as he,
Yet shall not Scot nor Scotland say,
But I will vengeance take,
And be revenged on them all,
For brave Lord Percy's sake.
This vow full well the king perform'd,
After, on Humble-down,
In one day fifty knights were slain,
With lords of great renown.

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